DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 173 815 CS 204 963

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TITLE The Energy of Talk. Language in the Classroom: A Series. 7.
INSTITUTION Calgary Univ. (Alberta). Faculty of Education.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 31p.; For related documents, see CS 204 957-966
AVAILABLE FROM Language in the Classroom Project, Room 706, EDCI, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada ($1.00 per copy; set of 10, $9.00, enclose payment with order)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Skills; *Expressive Language; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Language Usage; Linguistics; *Peer Relationship; Secondary Education; Speech Skills; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This pamphlet is the seventh in a series of ten stemming from the view that language is central to learning, that teachers can gain insights into their work and into learning by examining the language of the classroom, and that current language theory can be the means to such insights. The pamphlet describes a project in which recordings of student conversations were used to illustrate that talk is vital to student development. Various sections discuss the theme of the project, the complexity of expressive talk, expressive talk as "indwelling," talk as a means of moving from security to risk and discovery and as a means of achieving a greater whole, and talk as a life-long task. (FL)

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Language in the Classroom: A Series. 7

THE ENERGY OF TALK

W. N. Mowat

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CS 204963

Published by: Language in the Classroom Project and
Department of Curriculum and Instruction,
University of Calgary

First edition April 1977
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Obtainable from: Language in the Classroom Project
Room 706
EDCI
Faculty of Education
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

FOREWORD

This pamphlet is one of a series, produced as discussion papers by a group of teachers who participated in a graduate course in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Calgary. In development, the papers reflect the method of the boys of Barbiana: each paper has been shaped and tempered, through several stages by the input of the group. In intent, the series reflects the aims of the pamphlets originated by the Writing Across the Curriculum Project Team of the Institute of Education at the University of London, to whom we are indebted for pointing the way.

The series stems from a view that language is central to learning, that teachers can gain insights into their work and into learning by examining the language of the classroom, and that current language theory can be the means to such insights. Further, the series represents a conviction that teachers are in the best position to understand the heuristic role of language in the classroom as well as to assess the needs of children in the schools and that they are the most likely to find solutions for problems in classroom practice. To realize this potential and to extend their influence, teachers need to offer their ideas and experiences freely and be willing to consider the ideas of their colleagues openly. It is in this spirit of sharing that these pamphlets are published.

We are grateful to Al Kahanoff, Principal of Branton Junior High School in Calgary for his generous editorial assistance and for his help in seeing the pamphlets through publication.

We also wish to thank Miss Lorraine Cockle for the cover design.

James Britton
Merron Chorny

PART I: THE REASON WHY

Recently during a parents' day at an open area elementary school I sat in on several afternoon classes. What I saw was intriguing. Open areas, potentially scenes for chaos, were being used quietly and efficiently: children worked alone or listened respectfully to teachers. Yet even as I watched, a realization grew.

That evening it took its final form. Recounting events for someone else I found myself highlighting two opposing reactions. Underneath the sense of pleasure I derived at what was happening at the school, I found myself deeply concerned at what was not happening. Children were above all learning to accept control; they were also learning how to work on their own and how to listen. But, they weren't being given opportunities within what I'd seen of the school to talk about their experiences, their thoughts, their discoveries.

What was happening in that open area school was only part of what should have been happening. Instead of encouraging thought and interaction, the absence of walls had created an overconcern with control: it was obvious that every teacher felt the responsibility not to disturb neighbouring classes. Even teachers whose relationships with children were rewarding to watch, tightly confined the talk of their classes. Sadly, it was like watching a bird with a broken wing trying to leave the ground.

Talk is essential to a great deal of our learning. This doesn't mean that all learning must spring from talk. It does mean that talk can be that healthy second wing: it gets us off the ground, it gives us impetus for ideas, it draws forth from within us our own vaguely perceived ideas. What happened to my own reactions to the afternoon is a good example: the evening talk brought the essential elements out. What happens regularly among children playing is another: they have the opportunity - often denied them by schools - to talk and to act out in a fuller sense many things they've experienced during their classes.

Absence of talk is sad, both to watch and to know of, for talk does so much for all of us. We all use it constantly: we discuss things we've done and re-evaluate them for ourselves as we do so; we converse about conditions which please or bother us in our lives and come to clearer understanding; we talk over and try out possibilities inherent in decisions we must make. How we felt about the bear in the campground last summer, how we feel about abortion, how we come to a conclusion about the car we'll buy - our ideas on all these are modified through talk. And we know it. Not all of us know it consciously; yet, each of us has probably had the experience of saying to someone - friend, relative, or student - "Want to talk about it?" We know.

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We know, because consciously or otherwise each of us uses talk as a tool in our own learning. If we are attentive to our use of talk, listening to what we say and assessing what we gain through our own talk in any situation, we can perceive this for ourselves. We can do the same for the muscles in our legs as we walk: we can come to feel and understand how they help us in walking. Talk is learning muscle.

Yet in so many classrooms, in places for learning, children are expected to be able to walk without muscles, to learn without talk.

It's incredible what we've done in education. We're so concerned with control that we've deluded ourselves: we've convinced ourselves that talk detracts from learning and in its place we've created lectures and teacher-dominance and student passivity. At the entrances to schools, children must metamorphose into one-winged birds and silent skeletons. Once they step within the schools we deny them the reasonable use of a medium for learning which we as teachers use constantly. It is not surprising that we frequently learn more than our students: we do most of the talking.

Cassirer writes, "Eagerness and enthusiasm to talk do not originate in a mere desire for learning or using names; they mark the desire for the detection and conquest of an objective world". (1) We need to understand our world and our place in it if we are to survive in it. The cat can get by through coming to terms with such rudimentary things as hunger and procreation, mice and other cats. We can't get by with so limited a view of the world: the conditions for our physical and psychological survival are far more complex. The cat can handle all he needs to know through elementary processes. We can't.

Our world is so complex that in order to come to understand it, we must create form and order for ourselves. We do so by perceiving patterns, by making generalizations, by using symbols. Words are those symbols. "The primary task for speech," states Britton,"is to symbolize reality: we symbolize reality in order to handle it."(2)

"In the beginning was the Word" may mark the dawn of genesis; it also marks man's first step into humanity. With "the Word", man began. Order was perceived in chaos.

In the complexity which surrounds us, each of us needs to create his own order. We cannot live on someone else's terms, only on our own. That someone else can hit a ball doesn't mean that we can unless we have learnt for ourselves how to do so. We may have been shown how, we may have watched innumerable home-runs hit, but in the end we must try for ourselves. We must learn by trial and error. We cannot simply copy for

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we must use and build upon our own unique reflexes. It is the same with new symbols: in the end we must use them for ourselves for they take on meaning only in terms of what we know. A new word, a new idea must be linked by each of us to the personal knowledge each of us possesses. In the end we must face the fact that no two of us have built an identical meaning for any word or any event: the dictionary contains merely generally stated definitions. In this sense we are, each of us, our own god, our own creator of meaning from our surroundings. We cannot operate otherwise.

To recognize that we each build our own meaning is to begin to see how necessary it is that each of us must have the opportunity for doing so. Of course, children can learn in silence, in their own heads, but that is to limit the potential links to only those connections which are exposed as each child stirs up his own thoughts. Children can learn in silence as they read or as they listen, but that is to limit the potential links to only those which are exposed by a dredger following a predetermined course; a course, moreover, predetermined by someone else whose dredger perhaps delves deeper than the children's experience and ideas. Or, children can participate through talk, that learning muscle: it won't be in easily controllable silence, but they'll be doing their own learning and stirring up of multiple connections.

In free-flowing talk we help each other think. We spark ideas in each other. The added dimensions this offers us are vitally important to us: the stirring up of wider ranging connections permit us to create more comprehensive patterns and meanings from the world in which we live. In talk we do each other countless favours: no matter whether the talk delights or angers, it enriches because it helps us to extend our personal ordering of the complex world in which we live and must survive.

So, in talk we help each other think. That's one function. Yet there's another, equally important to us here. As we talk we become our own dredger, exposing connections we hadn't realized were there. We've all experienced that feeling of self-discovery, that feeling of, "Hey, I've got it!" which our own talk flashes to us. In the Writing Across the Curriculum pamphlet, From Information to Understanding, the authors write of one of the students they've listened to: "He discovers implications in the new information....And he discovers them only as he talks almost as if tripping up over them."(3)

Contrary to belief, we rarely "waste time" when we're talking. From the fantasy of childhood, through the chatter of children, to the discussion of adulthood and the retrospective contemplation of old age we constantly use words to come to terms with, to order the events of, our

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world. Except in the misconception of too many of us, "idle chatter" is hard to find: we are creatures who want to learn because to survive in a complex environment we must. We do not waste words in idleness.

Talk is vital, then, in this enormous ordering task to which we are drawn. To oversimplify, the computor does its critical reacting when it is activated to give an answer, when it is compelled to speak. As the compulsion to answer generates reaction, so the compulsion to speak generates thought.

If, as teachers we accept this, we are professionally bound to encourage student talk. We should ensure that it becomes a major means of learning in our classrooms; we should foster it at every opportunity; we should allow for it every time we want children to learn. And we want children to learn all day, so talk should be possible all day.

This is not to say that it should run amok, that we must sit helpless amidst its ebb and flow. Our role is vital. It is to encourage each child to stretch from what he knows towards new ideas valuable to him; it is to assist his growth so that he grows faster than he would have had he not known us. Such is the role we accept all the time: it is no different here except that we may do it better with flying birds, muscled skeletons, and an awareness of the power of talk.

The form the talk should take is being sensitively written of and researched by a growing number of people, most notable of whom are Douglas Barnes, Basil Bernstein, James Britton, John Dixon, William Labov, Leslie Stratta, Jane Tough, and Andrew Wilkinson. Let it suffice for now to say that children talking naturally and trustingly about things which interest and intrigue them will be talking well. If we start from there to work with our own intuition of what it is that makes each child feel better and more confident through talk, later we can come to Britton and the others with our own experiences of classroom talk and a stronger personal base from which to explore and make fuller meaning of their writing and their research.

PART II: OUT OF THE VALLEY OF DEATH

INTRODUCTION

Talk is beautiful. It enriches our daily lives. It enables us to reach new viewpoints. It lifts us to those moments when, through sharing in discovery with others, our stride is strengthened, our sense perceptions are intensified, and our love flows outward. Talk's potential for sharpening the significant in our lives and adding meaning to our lives is enormous.

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Three quotations capture the essence of this.

> It may seem paradoxical, but one comes best to know one's real self, and to be able to introspect honestly, as a consequence of unselected, spontaneous disclosure of self to another person.(4)

> A world in which everyone will be in touch needs people in touch with themselves:...it will be crucially important that each person master the skill of feeling what others feel.... Such empathy is possible only in one deeply aware of his own feelings....(5)

> Communication...has a creative power. It gives self awareness to each in the reciprocal relation with the other.... Each gives the other essential hospitality in his better self; each recognizes the other and receives from him that same recognition without which human existence is impossible. For, reduced to himself, man is much less than himself; whereas, in the light of openness to the other, the possibility of an unlimited growth is offered to him.(6)

The dialogue which follows is rich with this beauty and power of talk. It came about only because the two were unusual students. It is offered here, not as 'the thing to do' in schools, but as a sample of talk's potential. It is offered as an indicator of why talk should be encouraged, not stifled.

A CENTRAL THEME

Talk is so complex, so filled with things we intend and do not intend, that it is difficult for even the self-perceptive speaker to comprehend the range and subtlety of what he does in his own talk. The difficulties are vastly compounded when a non-participant to a conversation analyses it, so all which follows is proffered very tentatively. Linda is seventeen, at school, and happily living with her nineteen year old boy-friend, Don. Guyle, also seventeen, is in the same English class as Linda. These two, Guyle and Linda, on a free study assignment, set out to try to examine for themselves some of the complexities of life. They wanted to look at the significance of living, of people and relationships, of values; and, at their own places in these complexities. Over a three week period, approximately three hours of taped dialogue resulted. The dialogue covers several subjects. As Britton showed of the natural, free-flowing talk which he termed "expressive speech," spiralling occurs and subjects continually re-surface.

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Fascinatingly, one re-surfaces most frequently: it is the nature, and expectations, of friendship. Initially, I set out to tape and analyse this spiral, believing it to be a unifying element in the dialogue. However, this initial re-taping revealed that the participants were, through their general discussion of friendship, attempting to discover and define their particular relationship. Once more I re-taped and an early, vaguely felt suspicion which had been quietly growing on its own was born out. I edited yet again.

The result falls into two parts. The first gives some indication of Guyle's quiet, gentle, and highly fluent role throughout the tapes. The second part captures the essence of a purpose which prevades the whole dialogue. It speaks for itself.

Transcript I

G. You know what I was just...I was just thinking now...it crossed through my head-not meaning to insult you or anything...
L. Yeah.
G. Like that, but it seems like...you like symbolism...you like... you know-like, you like the class of people opening up. I mean is that...is that what you really feel? I mean is that what you really do feel?
L. The whole thing about people relating to one another, isn't that what living is for? I mean, I mean different people have different goals and that in life, but I mean so what if you have. You sit there and, you know, you don't...you know...I don't know, like, people you can see and you can know them half your life but you really don't know them.
G. Yeah.
L. Like my...
G. Yeah. Do you think it's necessary for people to tell you everything that's important? They are? Like their total being? Isn't you being yourself...isn't that...isn't that...? I...do you need to say to people everything that you ever thought about ...the true meaning of yourself, like the real thing inside of you? Not coke, there are other real things, that you know...
L. (laughs)
G. That they mean something. Get that, eh?
L. Yeah. That's a real laugh (laughs).
G. Ah, ah, you know the...do you mean that you're depressed because people don't come up to you...
L. (laughs).
G. And don't say I am...
L. (laughs).

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G. What I am because, bam-bam-bam-bam...take it off in a little list, mimeograph it and hand it to Linda so she can feel better. I think there's much more to a person, and if a person can't... feels that he can't open up to you like...sure...whatever...I use 'he' because I'm probably...

L. Ahah.

G. ...a he as well. If he can't open up to you, it's not, it's not his fault.

L. It's my fault because...

G. It's not even your fault. It's, it's what's inside of him. I mean people, some people are compatible and some people just aren't.

L. I know. I realize that, but then, like, but you see life...if you, if you can't open up to a person who you know and who you consider a friend then why...how can you consider them a friend when you don't even know each other?

G. You mean to be a friend you...to be a friend to a person, the other person has to tell you things that he hasn't even been able to tell himself?

L. Yeah but th...why can't he...

G. Like should he...should a person...

L. Tell himself though?

G. I mean it isn't, it isn't...I don't think it's anything to do with him; he just hasn't reached the place where he has to say it. I don't know, I know that, that some people just don't, just can't...I mean sometimes they really try and it...and it...and it sometimes ruins a person to not...to not be able to say what they want to other people.

L. I know but you see it might be...I know it takes so much time and it takes so much patience to get a person to open up.

This transcript gives an indication of how Guyle uses language to search for the Linda he can't see: he wants to know what she is, to know about her in the abstract, to satisfy through words a yearning to define her and thereby to perceive the potentialities of his relationship to her. Yet all the while he keeps himself separate, concentrating on words and thought even when Linda's laugh and admiration after the coke joke invite other contact and even though the "I use 'he' because I'm probably a he as well" indicates, particularly with the mis-placed 'probably', that he wants contact. Linda appears to use language more spontaneously; yet the thought stirs that she uses it defensively. She is confident, even exuberant, and whiny qualities in her voice together with her tendency to interrupt show that she is relaxed with Guyle, almost sisterly. However, the insistence on an openness which she cannot define may well be a desire for simple relationships which are easily defined and held away. She uses

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such techniques of language as her clear enunciation and a stress which she places on "a friend" to focus attention on abstracts and to create distance for herself.

The irony of it is that she obviously counts Guyle as one who is open with her, a friend, yet neither of them have fully opened up to each other. The second transcript would seem to bear this out. (In this transcript, I have used bracketed numbers which refer to Wilkinson's classification of language functions which I have included as the Appendix.)

At its opening, Linda's laugh is not a committed one: something is on her mind(10)*. Earlier (2 min. 55 secs.) Guyle had said, "Say you were talking to someone that you know love (stiff stress) and ah... say I'm kinda embarrassed to say that word love (stress again, and pause in which Linda didn't respond)/anyway...". Now Linda's impatient. She wants to go back to that and suddenly, sensitively, she takes the initiative(4):

Transcript II

L. Yea...heh heh...how come you're embarrassed to say the word love?
G. Ah...
L. Don't you know why?
G. It's tha...I, I'm not that really embarrassed to say the word love. I du...or even to mean it. Don't you find sometimes it's just hard to get the word out, sort of?
L. Haven't yet,!
G. Nuh, it just th...not that I'm afraid of love or any deep psychological meaning or anything...
L. Yea...
G. It's just that...or maybe it's because I feel love is just a word you...it's a little bit too heavy just to toss around here...you know what I mean? I mean it's...I don't know...I suppose I... maybe it's because of me. It embarrasses me if I say love. I don't know why. I, I...I really I don't know why...if I...if I di...I try to think, about it...I don't know, it's really kind of too much for my head to think right now... sorry...
L. That's okay.
G. I...I don't know.
L. You don't have to apologize...
G. I know...love is just such a...a big word...with four little letters but boy it's got a lot of stuff on there.
L. Yea...it does...
G. It's like a...all-pro defensive tackle...with a name like Shorty or something: six foot nine, a thousand pounds...
L. What do you mean?

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"How come" is a gentle, friendlier opening than "why" could have been and the tone is soft, loving, a statement to guide Guyle and an attempt to draw him into intimacy (8). Nonetheless, the objectivity of "the word love" and the blending of the three words into one seem to imply that still she needs to maintain the distance of their relationship (4).

The question throws Guyle into unusual silence, from which Linda needs to rescue him. Even as he starts to speak, she apparently sees that he can't come up with anything adequate and she helps him with the gentle but compassionately obvious, "You don't know why?" Add to this phrasing as a statement the delivery as a question, and she in one sentence combines a desire to explore (15) and, with the unspoken empathy (6), an agreement to cooperate (5).

Guyle is nevertheless taken aback. Unusual for him, his grasp of words breaks down. He has momentarily lost the ability to maintain self (1). He recovers quickly, using words to reflect on his own thoughts and feelings (16) and to analyse (2) and re-establish himself (1). The sense of his words connote reflection, but the undercurrents are strong. His "really" and "just" are uncertain, their sense supported by the tentative questioning of his voice and by the stress he places on "say" and "meaning it". The "really", falling before "embarrassed", seems an admission of embarrassment yet it is an attempt to suggest that he wouldn't be. Still, he can only bring himself to muffle "love" after the abstraction of "the word" and loses himself in "I du". He bluffs recovery with "or even to mean it" but has given himself away already and we know that even "to mean it" embarrasses him. Yet he tries another sortie out of the danger of his emotions, attempting to change the focus to Linda, but inadvertently admitting that "it's just too hard to get the word out". He seems, too, in the slurring of the phonemes in the question, to be striving to maintain the distance from himself and, in the sympathetic circularity of "sort of", to indicate that he is trying to cooperate (5) and to seek reassurance that he is still acceptable to Linda (4).

She rebuffs him: "Haven't yet uh". Perhaps he's had enough help and now she'll wait: her rebuff is clipped and harsh - it carries connotations of other loves (10 and 11) and of the ease she feels she has in honest facing of emotions (1). These connotations, the cadence she uses, and the laugh at his expense create a further shift in the relationship (4) which, with her first question, she had established between them. Then she was the understanding, maternal lover; now she is suddenly the experienced lover: her role-playing (7) is sophisticated, subtle.

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Guyle is defenceless. His guard down, he is caught fleetingly speechless. He appears to have lost control of self. But, Linda's cadence and her laugh also suggest self-deprecation and thus a willingness to continue to share (5): they have left a reassurance, an opening, for him. He wants to talk. He seems at once to want to use language to defend himself from implications of naivete' (4), to really face himself (1), and to, paradoxically, move towards and away from Linda (4). He appears to be genuinely searching within himself (2). He stands firm on defence: "not...afraid of love". He denies fear and the negative phrasing permits him to use the word without, as it were, using its meaning, so he rushes on into the abyss of "deep psychological meaning" in a bid for ill-defined authoritative support to re-establish his credibility (4) and his confidence (1). His "or anything" shows his uncertainty and Linda's interjected "Yea" offers support (5) even as he tries again with "just" to simplify and escape. But it won't do, so he tries to rationalize with "just a word that you". But that won't do either. Suddenly, softening the impact with "little", "bit", "just", and the off-hand "toss", he begins to face it: "it's... too heavy... here". And that's too much for him. He desperately entreats Linda for reassurance, which appears not to have been forthcoming and perhaps it is under her level stare that he despairs - "I don't know". He tries again, falters, uses "maybe" to reach out to Linda and with that support partially succeeds with "it's because of me". From there he can nearly admit all: "It embarrasses me". Expressive talk has taken him down inside himself but it's too much for now and he stops, incapable or unwilling to explore to the truth about his feeling for her.

Linda's "That's okay" and "You don't have to apologize", in their gentleness and compassion show her empathy and understanding. The tone of her "That's okay" and inflections of "Yea, it does" carry her disappointment and yearning. Yet she offers the three phrases as the firm stepping stones that Guyle needs in order to begin to re-establish his self. He does so rapidly, moving, confidence increasing, into other topics.

Linda goes with him and, together in the deep feeling which they share for each other, the two of them continue exploring the abstractions of their world.

THE COMPLEXITY OF EXPRESSIVE TALK

The inter-play in these two transcripts is not apparently dramatic. Linda and Guyle appear to be discussing self-identity and to be testing their intelligence and facility with language as they spend time teasing at ideas and trying out their relationship in words. Yet underneath this on an interpersonal level they use language constantly to suppress and sublimate subconscious desires and fears. The undercurrents are extremely

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powerful as the two of them use words to search for, and to restrict, contact. The inter-play is highly sophisticated, seen at its most complex in Linda's response, "Haven't yet uh". These three words could be said to be fulfilling up to nine of Wilkinson's language activities (1, 4,5,7,8,9,10,11,15)!

Any of these nine can be focussed upon and consciously understood for itself. All of them can be held simultaneously in our subsidiary awareness and looked through towards the meaning which results from their integration; but, we cannot focus both upon them as separate parts and upon their integrated meaning - even though in the latter exchange the meaning comes powerfully to us.

Against such qualifications the second and now obvious point to be made is that expressive speech is a medium of incredible complexity. Through it we build, as Britton has stated, our representations of the world, our retrospects and our prospects. Yet the complexity of these is such that thorough analysis of them appears impossible. What Lorenz in writing of Gestalt perception had to say about the mind is relevant here: it is "able to incorporate more individual data and more relationships between data into its calculations than can any rational process".(7) The difficulties arising in an analysis of talk, an extension of the mind, are compounded by this facility of the mind and characteristic of talk: we cannot retain meaning, grasp the range of individual data, nor their relationships "when we focus our attention upon the isolated particulars".

Regardless of this, the very complexities for which expressive talk serves as an extension are perhaps its greatest strength. They result in speech in which responses are almost instantaneous and adaptations are apparently beyond our conscious scope.

The first of these qualities is evident in those three words of Linda's: to incorporate so smoothly into "Haven't yet uh" so much so quickly is an indication of that speed of response. Other examples abound in everyday talk and in the tape, but two from the latter bear strong witness for they show the speed with which subtleties of situation and syntax are grasped and corrected for.

Transcript III

G. Yea, he's very like me. We think exactly alike. Not exactly alike but so close it's...ah...you know...and, ah...it's almost as if we share the same sort of head. We share, you know, share the same head sort of thing.

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L. Hm.
G. Like two independent halves of the brain but of the same opinion sort of thing.
L. Does he feel the same way about you?
G. I think so. Never asked him. There's never been a need to ask I don't think.
L. Well, when you need to ask...if you don't need to ask then may as well not ask.

Linda subsidiarily perceives even as she speaks that the phrasing of the cliche doesn't mesh here and she rephrases it, adjusting its meaning, to perfect synchronization. Again, a little later, she stops what she is about to say in order to add a two-word qualification whose breadth of perception and connotation belie conscious control:

Transcript IV

L. I was just going to ask you how long you've known Dave for.
G. Um, really this is funny: I was going to say about a thousand years, but really it hasn't been that long...suppose it's been maybe a year, and that's really strange...seems like I've known him all my life.
L. Maybe cause you sh...you sort of shared your life with him...

When it matters, Linda doesn't miss. When it doesn't matter as other things are more important, the contrast is revealing:

Transcript V

L. I don't know...I just feel lost for words right now...because like, Wednesday night...I don't know why because...but I was really worried...I don't know why what was the matter, but I just sort of let...because I was by myself, right, for a while, and I just sort of let everything out you know.

The speed of response evident in expressive talk is all the more amazing when the range and depth of the mind's adaptations are considered. All the transcripts already used capture this, though the second serves as the best example. In it Linda appears to range to every corner of herself to put together the three words, and in response Guyle goes deep within himself to search for and to cover what he feels but would not know. In a matter of seconds the two of them make subconscious discoveries and adjustments that hours of conscious analysis cannot cover and in words reveal the paradox of minds that hide themselves.

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This ability of expressive talk to reveal even the briefest glimpses of the intricate workings of our own minds is a characteristic to which we too rarely attune ourselves, and towards which we frequently fear to nudge our students. Measured against its potential, our hesitancy looks weak. The apparently chance remarks we make in expressive talk can put us constantly at "two roads diverged" points where we can pause to make conscious choices. The alternative is to be impelled always by forces we never face nor recognize. We can and do use talk as a wall from ourselves; we can and may use it as a window to look into ourselves. From the latter may grow greater honesty with ourselves and the hope of the same with others and possibly the opening of relationships of which we have literally only dreamed.

Expressive talk, if we give it rein, can lead us to discover of universality and of people. In a life which we live as individuals, separate from others, and in a world beset by inhumanity, it is a tool in its own right.

EXPRESSIVE TALK AS IN-DWELLING

Michael Polanyi sees our body as having a unique position in the universe. It is, he states, the means by which we distinguish between self and objects: this comes about because "it is the only collection of things which we know almost exclusively by relying upon our awareness of them for attending to something else".(8) Because our awareness of external objects is "altogether internal", because colours, sounds, smells, and all our experiences are received as stimulii and then given personal creation <u>within</u> us, our body is the tool by which we come to <u>feel</u> the world, by which we come to interpret it, by which we come to understand it. We do most of this subconsciously and that which we project out after reception, interpretation, and understanding of a stimulus is that which our senses have created within us. The paper we see before us is for each of us what we have created internally: we defined it when we drew it into ourselves. In projecting it outward we are equally capable of going with it in a state of <u>indwelling</u>, having used all our subsidiarily held clues regarding its texture, colour, weight, density, origins, composition, and uses to come to an understanding of it as "paper". Obviously the more extensive our knowledge of an object, the more fully we can indwell with it, the more perceptively we can understand it: we are closer to people than to objects and closer to people and to objects that we have met before than to those we have never seen.

Expressive talk can take us even closer. Through the "mutual trust ...between people who are willing to open their minds and personalities to each other"(9) knowledge of other people can be enriched and indwelling

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increased. The effect of this is reciprocal: as knowledge of others increases so the reflections it casts, the extensions made possible by indwelling, increase self-knowledge. Guyle and Linda exemplify this.

Their focal and subsidiary awareness of each other and of themselves expands so richly that when Guyle, talking about his father, is lost in intensity, Linda is able to indwell to the understanding of a universal truth:

Transcript VI

G. So, you'd...You'd say, "Yes." You'd pamper him and for another couple of months he would be fine, sort-of-thing. In the same suit, it is no excuse for abandoning... That did not bug him too much but it bugged the girls. So, once I gave him shit. I really did. He phoned and I didn't swear at him. I threw thousands of facts into his face and he didn't like it. What was really surprising is that he phoned me back an hour later and asked if I wanted to leave and move in with him. Ah. It was stupid. It was because I had made him look at what he...

L. At what was...

G. At what he was doing. I don't think he cared too much. It was just, he knew I was mad at him and he had to do something to ease the tension.

L. You know, I have got sort-of a funny feeling that right now you are not really talking to me, you are sort-of talking to yourself. Aren't you?

G. Yeh.

L. Well, you know what I mean...I think that's good. You're nervous I can tell.

G. Yeh. It isn't that I am nervous of you...

L. It's just...

G. Or that. It is just that I am nervous...

L. About the situation, maybe?

The listener and the speaker both grow to greater awareness of themselves and of each other here. And they do this continually. Another example has intense power:

Transcript VII

G. My Mom married a very...Well, what do you think about my Mom, first?

L. I think she's sweet. I...Honest to God...I looked at her and I thought...It can't be Guyle's Mom. Actually...

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G. What did you expect?
L. I expected one of them really slim women with beautiful hair, nice makeup and everything, and I seen this lady who was kind of pudgy, you know, rolypoly and...
G. Smiling...
L. Yeh, and she was just smiling...And you know...When she...Like I said, "Hi," and that, and she goes "Oh, Can I take you anywhere?" You know I just felt so...I felt sort of a warm feeling. I don't know.
G. Yeh. I've seen Mom. Um. Not that because I am her son, she is a very good person.
L. Uh huh...
G. And if I give the impression she is beautiful it's because she is.
L. Yeh.
G. Maybe not physically, but she is probably the warmest person I'll ever know.
L. Beautiful on the inside makes a person beautiful on the outside.
G. That's right. And she...And she is always smiling and...When she isn't smiling she's mad, and that's OK because she gets mad just like everybody else does but I can take that mad, I mean, but she is always smiling and she is always nice. She loves people and...
L. Does that sort-of make up for your Dad in anyway?
G. It does. It does. My Mom...My Mom was always sort-of...When I ...If I...I was kinda surprised when she brought home this big guy. My cousin introduced to...An older man...
L. Yeh.
G. A great big labourer type...Six-three, two-eighty, big bearded guy. He's got great big biceps, great big all over sort-of-thing. He's a huge guy.
L. Yeh.
G. He brought her home and he was very rough, well opinionated... Very grr, grr...
L. Yeh. (Laugh.)
G. And ah, so that sort of freaked me out. And then...Then...They finally got married after a long bout. You know. It was no short engagement or anything. And ah, he is the most loving person. He is a very loving person. I mean, he won't say, "I love you," I mean, except to Mom, sort-of-thing, but he took a family of four on.
L. Uh huh.
G. And then my sister moved out and he hated my sister. Everybody hates my sister, including my sister...hates herself, you know, hates herself...

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L. Why?
G. We'll get into that...
L. Later...
G. I always saw...It's so great...But he took us all...No...No... At all...He isn't...He just...You know. He accepted us as his own. And for a bachelor, all his life. He has never married What is he? Fifty-two...Fifty-five...
L. Uh huh.
G. He's been a bachelor all his life and he took us on, which are probably a very hard family to communicate with, and he took us... And it was just like he was our own father and he held no resentment at all. And it was very good. If you want anything, you ask him.
L. That's great.
G. He's a good guy. And he is fantastic for my Mom. I am glad she has finally found somebody that means something to her.

In representing to himself the value of the relationship between his mother and his step-father Guyle has moved closer to an understanding of them, and Linda, travelling with him, has moved to fuller indwelling of all of them. Together they have undertaken an experience which has built for them language and meaning in common.

And they move together constantly thus, helping and growing, incorporating fragments of experience into larger patterns, larger representations.

People help people grow: they influence each other and gain thereby themselves. By exposure to each other both Guyle and Linda gain confidence to work at their own representations; they begin to find more of their common humanity, to recognize the universality of man's search, to build security for themselves through seeing the world "as we".

FROM SECURITY TO RISK AND DISCOVERY

As story tellers, we edit and structure our account of events to match the expectations we have of our audience. To some audiences, anticipating ridicule perhaps, we reveal a minimum of ourselves; with others we risk much.

Guyle and Linda appear to risk a great deal. Said by Linda at one point, her "I stood and watched her walk across the street...in case she fell down" is potentially an admission of weakness which Linda herself perceives, judging by her following and somewhat defensive, "I got this thing about little, old ladies". But she can immediately balance that with a re-admission of feeling as she does by adding, "I can't help it"

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which could be re-phrased as 'That's the way I am'. At another point, Guyle who was annoyed at being "blackmailed" by a two-year old has the rug figuratively pulled from under him by the two-year old and admits it; he also admits to spending the whole of an afternoon in playing children's games which many audiences would judge to be simply ridiculous. Because they take these risks, because each of them ventures into self in the confidence that the other will respect what is exposed, the scope of what they can and do draw from deep within themselves is extended.

The risks they are prepared to take in each other's presence, the thoughts they foster in each other, permit them startling attempts to come to terms with life.

Transcript VIII

L. I think that is what life is about though you know...just sorta ...doing diff...if, if you don't feel hurt sometimes...lonely, empty, then the feeling of joy isn't in it...wouldn't mean anything.

G. I know what I feel right now is like a...somebody's ripped a just a little piece of my soul, just a little wee corner and a ...I left it there sort of thing...that's what it feels like, you know, something very important to you is gone...and that's really tough on me now.

L. You know, maybe that's what dying is. Okay, if you go through life, and every time you do something, express a feeling, or something, right? You lose a bit of your soul, and then when you're ready to die, it's because all your soul is gone.

That won't hold much water and Guyle jumps on it pretty fast, but it was a good attempt and captures much of Linda's feeling about the longing, evident throughout the tapes, to be open with people and pain, also evident, of being hurt by the lack of response.

A week later Guyle, after a walk along the banks of the "Epic river", and a concern with a never changing "rock which seems to be my prime topic right now", faces the possibility that man is "Nothing . We are just a biological group living on bought time or invented time and when the time runs out I suppose we'll have to wait. We'll have to see that we're not that important, to live with the river and not fight it...we are like rocks aren't we? Won't budge. Never learning anymore". Another week and he adjusts all this into a new formulation:

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Transcript IX

G. No, I don't think so. I think we are here to learn. I don't know why. It just sounds sensible. I don't know. The best part of your life is thinking. I think that makes sense that you would be here for learning.

L. Well, so what is all this learning going to amount to in the end?

G. I don't know. Just a little bit closer to...closer to heaven.

L. Heaven?

G. Or Hell.

L. What's Hell?

G. The way I see heaven and hell is that it is a sort-of Tibetism-Buddhism thing, where the only reason why you are here is to learn. And when you learn so much in life and then you progress. It's like...It's like dropping a rock in a pool of water...

L. Uh hum.

G. All these rings that come out from it. Right? Psychologists wrote down what these rings meant sort-of thing. Right? For instance, birth, which is the rock, dropping water. The next thing is like the baby learning about himself and his little toys and his crib and there is a definite stage of learning, you know.

L. Yeah.

G. So...And then all of a sudden it just...It just ends. I mean about here, you know. After you have learned about the world and started to share. And that's it, you know, and that's where you...that's where the whole thing ends. Does that sound sensible?

L. When you start to learn about the world of sharing?

G. And then that's where it ends in this life, I think, and I think that you just go on from there. I think you progress in a circle, you know, just like a rock in a puddle. Does the splashes...Do the waves stop after three or four little waves? Don't they go on forever? Don't they? Like the water in a calm pool, you see trillion little rings, you know...

L. Yeah, a trillion little rings go back.

G. Right. So then I think that, you know, you die within one ring and it is just like another rock being dropped, you know. Then you start over again, again, and then everytime you do, up you progress to...closer and closer to the infinite knowledge.

L. Oh, but when are we going to get there? How long does it take?

G. Just say...I don't know...if....it's forever. I mean, when do you think you could ever learn everything? Do you think that's possible? To learn everything?

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Compact and encompassing as this seems, it's not enough for either of them. Moments later, after they have been spectating over the pathos of Charlie's situation at the end of "Flowers for Algernon", Linda, from unvoiced concern at our inability to reconcile reality with godliness, attempts to create a new prospect:

Transcript X

L. I wish there was one man who could answer all the questions. Just...I wish I could just see...If there's a God, I wish I could see him for half an hour and say, "What....What the Hell," you know.
G. Yeah.
L. If there was a God. I don't know if there is or not. Maybe we are all God.
G. Well, I...
I don't know. I don't think we can ever find out what the whole thing is really about...
L. Um. But why in the...Why can't we? There's got to be a way. There's got to be.
G. Maybe after a couple million, trillion lives we will finally find out what we are all about. It would be just great.
L. But why can't we know now?
G. Because it isn't important now.
L. Don't you feel that it is important?
G. Yeah, it's very important. Necessary.
L. I don't see why we can't do it now.
G. Yeah, I don't see why either, but you can't.
L. Why can't we just...You know, go up on a mountain or something. I...Say, "God," or whoever the Hell...You know..."What's going on here?"

Within another five minutes Guyle drawn out by the question of whether or not God is easily accessible to man seems to have forgotten that "learning" is the way to heaven:

Transcript XI

G. I just think he gives...I think he invented us and said, "OK, now do your stuff." I just look...You know, he will throw these little wee things at your face, you know, like, and make you choose which way you want to go. And if you choose the right way, which is his way, whichever way that is. I don't know... And you choose the right one, you are just that much closer to

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> Heaven or Hell.
> Kind of stupid. If we got a religion that never set any boundaries, it is just like, which is right and which is wrong. You know. I don't know.

Such talk is vitally important to us: "As we talk about events," writes Britton, "we shape them in the light of, and incorporate them into, the body of our experience, the total."(7)

The sketching of Guyle's movement through the rock, the water, his reading, his sense of guilt at hurting others, and his fascination with learning and the enormity of knowledge is intriguing. He has come to invest with personal meaning the pattern of order, the representation he makes and yet even as he talks and incorporates further facts into his lesser representations he shapes the larger in light of that experience. In time he may analyse its construction and perceive the role he played within it for himself. The odds on such discovery are greater if he can continue to take risks in expressive talk with someone whom he trusts. The value of such discovery will be that he will become master of himself.

It is towards such self-actualization that expressive talk leads. It mines the resources which in the depth and complexity of their discovery are, as Lorenz said, beyond our rational grasp.

A GREATER WHOLE

The flow of talk has carried Guyle and Linda together, even across rifts which sometimes divide them. They have explored beyond the concept of expressive talk as representation. Admittedly, they have used it to build representation but they have done more. In building representations they have learned to engage in communication: they have developed a reciprocal relationship with each other, giving in order to receive. True expressive talk is in the end communication equally as much as representation building.

The danger of conceiving it primarily as the latter is that it may become a tool used for selfish ends: a medium used by the talker purely for his own purpose, his own building of meaning without willingness to dwell in the constructs of others. Expressive talk as communication moves beyond this: it gives as much as it receives. "The saving grace of communication," writes Gusdorf, "is the discovery of one's fellow man... For, reduced to himself, man is much less than himself; whereas, in the light of openness to the other, the possibility of an unlimited growth is offered to him."(11) In open communication two people who are capable of taking advantage of their ability to work with and through tacit knowing

to fuller indwelling can become, as Polanyi's writing implies, a greater whole operating through a "structural principle" wherein the parts, limited individually by their physical and biological laws, can in combination create new higher laws for themselves as an entity. Such is the structural principle of the watch, the parts of which are governed by the laws of inanimate nature but which, through the integration of their functions, create new laws for themselves.

Obviously, such human integration would be difficult to assess, but it would appear that we have a second type of talk spiral to go with that of Britton mentioned earlier. It's a spiral which at one end mines the deepest experiences to enrich awareness at the other: growth either way results in growth the opposite way and so, energizing itself, the spiral expands, growing both ways.

A limitation of the spiral is that the new can be interpreted only in terms of the old. The significance of this is enormous; its implications are fascination: starting with the ability to perceive, as Polanyi points out, only our body, we use it literally to make sense of the world. Reacting to stimulii and internalizing the objects of the world around us in order to come to understanding of them, we interpret those objects in terms of what we know of ourselves. A rattle pressed upon the cells of my fingers, made images within the receptacles of my eyes, and moved the mechanisms of my ear: thus I "knew" the rattle. Knowing it, I could come to conclusions about other objects with any, or any combination, of the rattle's characteristics. Thus is knowledge accommodated and assimilated.

It is a startling paradox that we appear to go through life learning nothing that is new. The atom must need be seen, must need be explained, in terms of a model whose parts are known to us; then can we take it and miniaturize it; then can we understand that the fuselage of an airplane in which we are travelling is more space than matter; then can we begin to understand more finely the principles by which it handles the stresses it must. And thus is more knowledge accommodated and assimilated: the more we know, the more we can know. New discoveries truly are "Eurekas!" - they are highly perceptive integrations by gifted people of what is already known: and so the rest of us are led to the shock of recognition, the sense of finding revealed before us that which we already know.

The new, handled in terms of what we know, only becomes sensible to us when it has been fully categorized, fully cross-referenced within us, according to what we recognize in it: then, because its cross-references are unique, because it takes on thereby a character of its own created through the combination of its parts, it is as itself recognizable. It

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follows that anything too foreign to us cannot be successfully integrated into our knowledge: we will see it only in terms of those characteristics which we recognize and these may not be adequate enough to make the object significant. The spiral, extending both ways, keeps firm reference points.

Knowing each other well, sensitive to each other's concerns, willing to expose and to risk, Linda and Guyle create new experiences for each other and do so without losing that contact with the known.

Transcript XII

L. Everytime I see a little kid, I...I think they are so cute. I mean they are so uninhibited. You know. They will just do as they feel sort-of-thing. That's what bothers me a lot, too, when I see mothers and their kid...When a little kid goes into a a little...a grocery store or a store, I mean, this is...You know. All these things around him, he's...He's, you know, curious.
G. Yeh.
L. As to what. You know. What is it? And the little kid...The little kid goes to touch something. Wham! You know. Right away. Why doesn't she take him and show him what it is? What's it's for?
G. Yeh.
L. Sort of thing.
G. Yeh.

Linda's account and insight are clearly shared by Guyle. Possibly he already knew what Linda recaptures here; if so, he has received reinforcement and a broader base for his knowledge. If not, the insight meshes so closely with what he does know that he can integrate its new elements confidently. Through talk the two of them travel well together. They continually spark thoughts in each other and provide each other with opportunities for significant indwelling; and, each indwelling in which they participate multiplies the potentials for the future. Built on talk, their exchange is a rich one and the balance they have struck, the combination of themselves that they continually remake, moves them as a greater whole towards Gusdorf's "possibility of unlimited growth". Talk has taken them an immense distance together.

PART III: NO ENDING

When we talk there is no conclusion. It is a vast and life-long task to which we are drawn. Even as we know more, we find there is more to know. This weaving of a network of patterns to secure us against the increasing flux of life never ceases. As we grow from infancy onward and

the scope of our life expands, so we need to widen our understanding; as man grows in knowledge and the boundaries of the universe both implode and explode, so we need, each of us, to find our own anchor points.

Talk such as that between Guyle and Linda is a powerful tool for creating and exposing those anchor points. Yet theirs is only a sample. We all use talk purposely, whether we know it or not. And children whether they know its purposes or not, delight in using it. Classrooms in which students' expressive talk is justly valued tend to be happier places because talk is a fruitful exercise. It provides avenues for the discovery of anchor points which make our survival possible. It is essential to us; and children, valuing it instinctively, delight in it greatly.

Anyone who has listened to children is well aware of this. Not so apparent is the value of talk to older students. The transcript following is a brief, edited, excerpt from the talk of three grade eleven students discussing "life and friendship".

Transcript XIII

S. What's the worst thing that ever happened to me? I think my friend dying in a motor-bike accident. It's not the same as if ...ah...my aunts have died and everything but you just don't know what your friends are like, you know.
T. Yea. We never really know each other, do we? Even though we see each other at school.
S. I wouldn't want to know everybody. The more people you know, the more conflict you get, you know.
T. I know a lot of people...sure we have conflicts and all that. Some do drugs and some do...
S. Yea. Right, but it's...ahh, what's the word? If you're sorta just staying in the middle instead of trying to go around everybody, I think you're a lot better off and I think everybody is. I don't think anybody's got a <u>true</u> friend.
T. They don't.
J. They do. I think they do. I think everybody does, although they won't admit it.
T. I can't agree with that. I don't think everyone has a true friend, because, you know, I think your friend's just like a... he's not another part of the act, helping you along...
J. I'm not a true friend if I'm not sharing your problems ?
S. What's that (How do you mean)?
T. What's a true friend though? One who sits beside you and says, "Oh, I'm sorry!"? One who lends you money?

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J. I think there's a little more to it but...you can't explain it. It's just there. I think of true friends as people who stick it with me to the end. I even think that sometimes it even goes further than that...goes beyond your family. I can go to a friend with problems that I couldn't go to my family.
S. Oh yeh!
T. Oh yea!
J. And that's a true friend, isn't it?
S. No...
T. Not really...
S. That's kin a like a...
T. A psychiatrist. You don't pay for it.
S. Right!

There is nothing that particularly distinguishes this excerpt from the rest of their conversation; it is typical of the whole. Nonetheless, significant things related to learning are happening. Four teenagers, the listener, too, judging from later comments, are attempting to define the elusive nature of friendship and in the challenging of J's generalized ideals which is occurring they are having to do some searching thought. In this conversation, no answers are agreed upon nor arrived at individually, yet there can be no doubt that the questions remain with each of them. Questions, the recognition of problems, are an early stage in any learning sequence, and these questions have been made significant through talk.

Any remaining question about whether or not talk is crucial to learning can best be answered by Guyle:

> Firstly, doing this project, for me, was a rewarding and fulfilling thing to do. It was not forced or pushed to be completed; it just happened that way. After we were finished we worried that it wouldn't be acceptable to anybody else but us. It occurred to Linda as well as to me that we had done more for ourselves than anytime before. It seemed that as we talked about a set of questions on the things we believed, the thoughts were permitted to grow and deepen, whereas on paper we were hindered by a pen and the pressure to do it right. That's not because we were unable to write or anything like that, it's just that words come out of my mouth easier than out of a pen. It was nice to have someone to talk to and then to help you better express yourself. Like a mirror, a guide to help you see. Often I would be talking, then all at once, "An enlightenment!" A little lightbulb and everything. You'd be looking at the idea from a whole different point of view. It would help me to see more clearly. It was good to react to Linda's values as she did to mine. Somehow

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this would deepen your perception of your values, to re-establish them or to denounce them, I suppose. In a way you could form a set of values more firmly because you had two viewpoints to go by, either opposite or coinciding. They enabled me to judge and determine my path. At any rate it was a most important thing to be able or to be allowed to learn in this fashion. It's too bad this type of thing couldn't be promoted in this system because I have never got more out of a class than last year. It will be forever embedded in my mind. It was a complete feeling to be able to have a chance to do that sort of thing. I wish I could have done it earlier in my life so I could compare. But then again, it probably wouldn't have worked: there was no Linda then.

Having seen the value of talk is just a beginning. How to use it well in a classroom will demand sensitivity, timing, and the best of all of us who teach. And, until we know more about talk, it will require luck. That is part of the risk. It takes a lot of courage to say, "Go, thou, and talk!" even when everything seems to have been thought of, but it's worth it.

FOOTNOTES

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APPENDIX

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10.2 A classification of language functions

As we have indicated, there are various ways of classifying language functions. Each have their particular advantages. The categories below are drawn from young children's talk, such as the dialogue between Edmund and Lois in the previous chapter.

In any interchange it is likely that there will be three kinds of activity going on. One is concerned with the self-expression of the individual, the maintenance of his amour propre, the defence of his own territory. This is concerned with the question 'Who am I?' It is a matter of introspection, self awareness, as well as assertion. A second is concerned with the relationship with others: establishing contact, maintaining bonds, moving between intimacy and distance, cooperating. There are also matters of understanding, sympathizing with, getting inside the other, guiding the other. This language is concerned with 'Who are you?' A third kind of activity is concerned with exploring, describing, analysing, reflecting on, explaining the world that was, that is, that will be. This is concerned with the question 'Who or what is it, was it, will it be?'

An apparently simple question, 'Where are you going?', could be fulfilling all three kinds of activity: asserting the rights of the speaker to know; establishing or keeping contact with someone else, and attempting perhaps to alter his intention; and obtaining information. Here are the categories set out:

Who am I?	1	Establishing and maintaining self
	2	Language for analysing self
	3	Language for expressing self (for celebrating or despairing, etc.)
Who are You?	4	Establishing and maintaining relationships
	5	Co-operating
	6	Empathising, understanding the other
	7	Role playing, mimicry
	8	Guiding, directing the other
Who/what is he/she/it?	9	Giving information
	10	Recalling past events (past)
	11	Describing present events (present)
	12	Predicting future events - statement of intention statement of hypothesis, what might happen
	13	Analysing, classifying
	14	Explaining, giving reasons for
	15	Exploring - asking questions, but in other ways also, by 'sounding out' people
	16	Reflecting on own/others' thoughts and feelings